

BPS201
Certificate in Buddhist Studies
(General)

Department of the Buddhist & Pali Studies
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DEPENDENT ORIGINATION
(PATTICA SAMUPPADA)

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Nature is governed by the law of Paticca Samuppāda. The law, therefore, literally means "Dependent Arising" or "Dependent Origination." It is only a discourse on the process of birth and death and not a theory of the ultimate origin of life. It deals with the cause of rebirth and suffering, but it does not in the least attempt to show the evolution of the world.

Paticca Samuppāda explains that *samsara*, the process of repeated existences, is perpetuated by a chain of interconnected links of cause and effect; it also reveals the method of breaking this chain and putting an end to the process. In this chain, one incident depends upon one previous to it and gives rise to one after it. Everything in this world can be brought in a chain of cause and effect. Nothing can originate without depending on something else previous to it. No originated thing, which does not give rise to something else in its turn. Anything can be traced upwards to where it did originate from; and everything can also be traced below, to that which is produced depending on it.

The Buddha meditated over the cause of the suffering of life. He believed that all the sufferings of life, if examined closely, have a cause linked to it. He continued investigating within himself with his scientific spirit to discover the deepest cause of suffering, to understand how the entire phenomenon works, to trace to its source in Paticca Samuppāda.

The suffering of life – old age and death (*jarā-marana*) – are inevitable consequences of being born, thus depend on birth (*jāti*). On what does birth depend? Birth occurs because of the endless process of becoming (*bhava*) in which the entire universe is involved. Nothing comes out of nothing. A thing is produced out of something. So, birth, is not possible if there is no previous existence. Even at the time of death the process does not stop. The body continues to decay, while the consciousness becomes connected with another material structure, and continues flowing.

Why this process of becoming? Life is a chain of constant attachment (*upādāna*) for the attainment of what one seeks after. Out of attachment, one generates strong reactions, *sankhārā*, which make a deep impression on the mind. At the end of life, one of these will arise in the mind and will give a push to the flow of consciousness to continue.

What does attachment depend on? It depends upon craving (*tanhā*). Attachment arises because of the momentary reactions of liking and disliking. Liking develops into

great craving; disliking into great aversion, the mirror image of craving, and both turn into attachment.

On what craving depends upon? It is only when one gets a pleasant sensation (*vedanā*) that one has a desire to enjoy it. Whenever one gets an unpleasant sensation, one dislikes it and wants to get rid of it. So craving depends upon feeling.

Then, what does sensation depend upon? They occur because of the contact (*phassa*) between any of the senses and an object: contact of eye with a vision, of the ear with a sound, of a nose with an odour, of the tongue with a taste, of the body with something tangible, and of the mind with a thought. As soon as there is a contact, sensation is bound to arise.

What is the reason for contact? The entire universe is full of sense object. So long as the six senses are functioning, they are bound to have contact. So contact depends upon the six sense organs (*salāyatana*).

Why do these sense organs exist? They are inseparable parts of the flow of mind and matter (*nāma-rūpa*). They arise as soon as life begins. So, the six senses depend on mind and matter.

Why does the flow of mind and matter occur? Mind and matter have got no sense in it if we have no consciousness of the object. They depend on the flow of consciousness (*viññana*), from moment to moment, from one life to the next.

On what does consciousness depend? It depends on the mental reactions (*sankhārā*). Every reaction gives a push to the flow of consciousness. The flow continues because of the impetus given to it by reactions.

Why do mental reactions occur? They arise because of ignorance (*avijjā*). One does not know what one is doing, does not know how one is reacting, and therefore one keeps generating *sankhārā*. So long as there is ignorance, suffering will remain. This ignorance consists in taking a thing to be permanent and unchanging. If ignorance can be eradicated, suffering will be eradicated.

How can one break the chain of suffering? With the right understanding, one must fully comprehend the Four Noble Truth and understand the nature of anicca or impermanence. If out of ignorance, one reacts to sensations, then one multiplies the *sankhārā*, multiplies one's suffering. But, if one develops wisdom and does not react to

sensations, the *sankhārā* are eradicated, this suffering is eradicated. In this way, the chain of Paticca Samuppāda is broken and there will be no more rebirth and suffering. One stops the turning of the wheel of suffering and starts rotating it in the opposite direction, toward liberation.

When wisdom arises, there is no ignorance. When there is no ignorance, there is no *sankhārā*. When there is no *sankhārā*, there cannot be any consciousness. If no consciousness, no mind and matter. If no mind and matter, no six senses. If no six senses, no contact. If no contact, no feeling. If no feeling, no craving. If no craving, no attachment. If no attachment, no existence if human life. If no existence, no birth. If no birth, no death, decay and suffering. Thus, the cessation of this entire wheel of suffering.

The main purpose of Paticca Samuppāda is to establish the reason why we suffer, and to find a way of eliminating suffering once and for all. By practicing the Noble Eightfold Path, one will gradually progress towards a stage which all *sankhārā* leading to new birth, and therefore to new suffering, have been eradicated: the stage of total liberation, full enlightenment. Paticca Samuppāda is at the very heart of the Dhamma. As The Buddha stated, one who understands Paticca Samuppāda accurately, also sees the Dhamma. And the one who sees the Dhamma fully, is one who has entered the stream and will soon put an end to all suffering.

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